

American University Department of Government
M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
American Politics/Applied Politics
Fall 2010

This exam consists of questions drawn from the field of American Politics and questions drawn specifically from our Applied Politics concentration offered through the Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute, the Campaign Management Institute, and the Women in Politics Institute.

DIRECTIONS: You will write three essays. Be strategic in your selection of questions, choosing those that allow you to show the greatest breadth of your knowledge. Notice that in almost every case, you are expected to demonstrate your knowledge by drawing on a range of appropriate scholarship.

- **All** students must answer **one** question from **Section I**.
- Students in the **Applied Politics** concentration must answer **one** question from **Section II** and **one** question from **Section III**.
- Students not in the Applied Politics concentration may answer two questions from Section II or one from Section II and one from Section III.

Clearly identify the questions you choose to answer. Please use 12-point type, double-space, and standard margins when preparing your essays.

SECTION I

1. Senator Tom Coburn thinks that political science has made few contributions to our understanding of American politics and has proposed eliminating National Science Foundation funding for the discipline. As you consider the academic literature on American politics over the last 50 years, what would you regard as the major contributions to understanding politics and why? If you were going to create a summary of our contributions, what would you include?

2. Is political science relevant to policy makers? Some argue that political scientists have a bit of "physics envy," in which they would like to be able to come up with theories that could predict the state of the world. Also some critics say political science has "economics envy," in which they wish that powerful people would call them up and ask for advice. But there is a reason that they don't call. They don't want to hear, 'It kind of depends' and, 'it depends on the context.'

Should political scientists change their approach and style enough to be more relevant? Why or why not? Provide several examples, draw from scholarship, to show when political science has been relevant to policymakers. What recommendations do you have for making the discipline more relevant to decision makers?

SECTION II

1. Some political analysts predicted the emergence of a robust “New Democratic Majority” based on voting trends among young voters in 2008. Others claim that the electorate responds more to the candidates, issues and conditions of particular elections than to prior voting behavior or deeply held ideological beliefs or partisan loyalties. Discuss the scholarly research and different perspectives on this question. How much change might we expect in 2010, and why? Be sure to cite relevant literature on voting behavior as well as public opinion.
2. For many years scholars of voting behavior claimed that campaigns make little, if any, difference in the outcome of presidential elections. In recent years, this view has been challenged in the study of presidential elections, but also by extending the arguments to different kinds of elections. What are the arguments for both sides of this debate (campaigns matter, campaigns don’t matter)? Which do you find more convincing and why? Be sure to discuss both theoretical developments and empirical evidence, as well as presidential and non-presidential elections. Remember to draw on a range of appropriate scholarship.
3. In a recent *Roll Call* article, Don Wolfensberger observed, “This is the first time since enactment of the Budget Act in 1974 that the House has not adopted a concurrent resolution on the budget. And it’s very unusual for no regular appropriations bills to be signed into law by Oct. 1. The Constitution may not be broken, but Congress’ constitutional purse strings have been seriously tattered” (September 28, 2010). How do you explain this noticeable departure from previous congresses? And does this represent a marked or incremental departure from our recent past. Be sure to cite a range of scholarship to show your command of this material.
4. Richard Neustadt’s fifty year old classic, *Presidential Power*, remains relevant to serious scholars of the presidency even today. Why do you believe this is the case? Be sure to highlight the main points of *Presidential Power* in your answer, along with the key arguments of other scholars, including but not limited to: Stephen Skowronek, Clint Rossiter, James David Barber, and Fred Greenstein. To earn maximum credit, be sure to explain the main points of their works, as well as how they mesh (or don’t mesh) with Neustadt’s views.

SECTION III—Applied Politics

1. Study after study finds that there is no bias against women candidates; they are as likely as similarly situated men to achieve victory on Election Day. But a wide body of evidence also reveals that gender remains relevant in the electoral process. Identify four ways that gender affects who runs and how they navigate the campaign trail. Be sure to cite multiple sources for each way that gender matters. Then, make an argument for which of these factors provides the greatest impediment to women's numeric representation.

2. In both the 2006 and 2008 elections the political environment seemed to favor Democratic candidates. In 2010 the political environment seems to be favoring Republican candidates. Identify aspects of the political environment you consider important and discuss the role they play in political campaigns. Include in your discussion the effect of the political environment on candidate recruitment, fundraising, and turnout, as well as other factors you think are impacted by the political environment.

3. President Obama and others have attacked lobbyists as a major problem in our democracy. He does not define lobbying and who is a lobbyist very well. Write a memo to the president defining the legal definition of a lobbyist. Add to the memo a discussion of all of the elements of modern day lobbying that are not included in that definition. Recommend how one could bring more transparency and enforcement to the lobbying profession, a goal of the president. What has been the major impact of President Obama's attack on lobbyists? What would be the impact of your recommended reforms? Draw on publications as appropriate.